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ON PAGE 4

NEW YORK TIMES
24 March 1987

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Afghan War: Was Aid Stolen?



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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 23 — The General Accounting Office has started an investigation into allegations that millions of dollars in covert American military aid intended for the Afghan insurgents never reached them, agency officials said today.

The investigation was begun in response to a formal request from Representative William H. Gray 3d, a Pennsylvania Democrat who is chairman of the House Budget Committee.

In a Feb. 25 letter to the G.A.O., the auditing arm of Congress, Representative Gray asked it to find out "if funds have indeed been diverted." He said he wanted to be informed "of the amounts involved and the eventual recipients."

The investigation comes in the wake of Congressional inquiries into the diversion of funds in another covert operation — aid to the Nicaraguan rebels, also known as contras.

Repeated Allegations

Since the United States began giving covert aid to the anti-Soviet guerrillas in Afghanistan seven years ago, there have been repeated allegations that large amounts of military matériel bought by the Central Intelligence Agency and funneled through Pakistan never reached them.

Groups with access to the shipments have traded, sold or hidden large amounts of the equipment, according to Pakistanis and Afghans and Western diplomats in Pakistan.

Administration officials acknowl-

edge that various intermediaries and the guerrillas themselves skim the arms shipments, but there is no agreement on the amount that is lost. These officials say that estimates by members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that between 30 and 50 percent of the aid never gets to the groups for which it is intended are nothing more than wild guesses.

"It is true that there still isn't enough accountability," an Administration official said. "There is still a need for better monitoring."

Arms Transported to Karachi

Monitoring is difficult because the operation is conducted through independent arms dealers and front companies that buy Soviet-origin and Soviet-style military equipment on various arms markets and transport them to Pakistan, usually by sea to Karachi.

Because Pakistan will not allow more than a small number of American agents to oversee the operation inside the country, responsibility for receiving the shipments and delivering them to the guerrillas falls to the Pakistani military, which is believed to have sold some of the weapons on the black market.

As clandestine aid to the Afghan insurgents has rapidly increased, many in Congress who strongly support giving more aid say they have become concerned about diversions. Aid jumped from \$280 million in fiscal 1985 to \$470 million in fiscal 1986 and \$630 million in the current fiscal year.